Mary Magdalene and the Dragon (Grace Hassan)

Long ago, a woman walked the land, a woman of wisdom and great devotion. One day, she came upon a great dragon; a creature of fear and chaos. But she did not strike it down or run from its shadow. Instead, she faced it with a steady heart and strong spirit, taming the beast with faith alone. This is not a tale of battle - or battle as we know it - but of change, of meeting darkness, not with the sword but with light.

Long ago, after she walked beside Christ the Messiah and had seen his wonders, Mary Magdalene travelled far. Some say she came to Gaul, others whisper that she reached the wild shores of €ru.

Wherever it was, the people there lived in fear, for in the hills beyond the village, a dragon had made its lair. It was a creature of shadow and fire. Its scales were black as iron, its breath stunk of death. No blade could pierce it, no wall could keep it out. The dragon took what it pleased; gold, cattle, and sometimes the lives of those who dared to stand against it.

The people prayed for salvation but none dared to face the beast; none that is, except one. On a still night, as the sea whispered below and the wind carried the scent of rain, Mary Magdalene climbed the cliffs that rose high above the land, her cloak wrapped tight around her bare feet. Steady on the stone she stood, at the mouth of the dragon's cave. The air was thick with the scent of smoke and ruin. She called,

"Come forth old one, I have words for you."

The ground trembled, a deep growl rumbled from the cave's depths, then slowly as the turning of the tide, the dragon emerged. Its eyes burned like embers, its wings stretched wide, it reared up vast as the sky, and roared. Mary did not move, did not raise a weapon, she did not flee. She raised her hands, empty and unafraid.

"You have tormented this land and taken from those who have no strength to resist you. Tell me, why do you hunger so?" The dragon snarled, lowering its head to meet her gaze. Its voice was a deep rumbling thing, like a distant thunder.

"I hunger because I am empty. I destroy because it is all I have ever known."

Mary stepped closer, her voice soft but firm. "You were not born with fire in your throat and sorrow in your heart. Who cast you into this darkness? Who taught you fear?

The dragon blinked, its great body shifting upon the stone. No one had asked the question before.

"I was cast out long ago, feared and hunted. I learned to strike before I could be struck."

Mary nodded as if she had known this all along.

"I too, was cast aside," she said. "Judged, called unworthy. But I tell you, one is not made by what they have suffered. One is made by what they choose to become."

The dragon let out a long breath, smoke curling from its nostrils. Its great head lowered further, the glow in its eyes dimming with sadness, almost. "But what else is there for a creature like me?" he asked.

Mary reached out her fingers, grazing the rough scales of its snout.

"There is peace, friend. There is rest. There is another path." Silence stretched between them, then. With a deep shuddering sigh, the dragon bowed its head. From that day on, the land was free.

Some say the dragon slipped into the sea, never to return. Others whisper it still watches over that place, no longer a beast of terror but a guardian of the land. And so, Mary Magdalene walked on, continuing her adventures and leaving behind a land changed, not by the sword, nor by fire, but by the power of her words and the peace in her heart.